

## Pay Increase Voted for Hill, Top Officials

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By a margin of a single vote, the House yesterday approved an annual cost-of-living pay raise for Congress and all other top-level government officials except the President.

Approved by the Senate Tuesday evening, 58 to 29, and strongly supported by President Ford, the bill assures pay increases this year, and as long as inflation continues, for more than 17,000 federal employees who have not had a salary increase since March, 1969. The cost of living has gone up 47 per cent during that period.

The legislation was requested by the President to stem the departure of federal judges and top civil servants for higher paying private employment. The bill covers members of Congress (who now make \$42,500), the federal judiciary (\$40,000 to \$62,500), the Vice President (\$62,500), Cabinet members (\$60,000), top military officers and employees in the top classified jobs now frozen at \$36,000 a year.

The bill also raises former President Nixon's pension of

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\$60,000 a year, which is pegged to a Cabinet member's salary.

Under the formula in the bill, those covered by it will receive the same percentage increase each year as the President recommends, under pay "comparability" statutes for lower-level civil servants.

The first increase, effective in October, is expected to range from 3 per cent to 8.6 per cent. The President's advisers have recommended an 8.6 per cent increase for all federal employees to maintain comparability with private employment. The President's previous statements suggest that he may try to cut this back to 5 per cent.

If Mr. Ford tries to reduce the pay raise, he must submit his plan to Congress. If his plan is rejected by a majority vote in either house, the 8.6 per cent increase would take effect. Congress has rejected previous presidential efforts to postpone or reduce federal pay raises under this procedure. But since now for the first time congressional pay is involved, Congress may be

less inclined to veto a reduction.

The one-vote margin, 214 to 213, reflects the jitters that always seize Congress when it is confronted with a vote on raising its pay. As the 15-minute roll call ended, the electronic tally board on the wall of the House chamber showed the pay raise had lost by one vote, 213 to 214.

But Speaker Carl Albert (\$62,500) kept the voting machinery open as several votes switched back and forth, and when it settled down at 214 to 213 in favor of the pay raise, he gavelled it through. Albert said later that he hoped it would end in a tie so he could cast a vote for the pay raise. Traditionally, the Speaker votes only to break a tie.

The always difficult feat of putting through a congressional pay raise was achieved by unaccustomed speed. The Senate passed the bill late Tuesday evening. Early yesterday morning, the House Rules Committee approved a resolution permitting the House to accept the Senate Bill without a House-Senate conference,

and it was all over before any public uproar could build up.

House Minority Leader John J. Rhodes (R-Ariz.) opposed the bill on grounds that Congress is largely responsible for living cost increases by increasing federal spending.

But Rep. John B. Anderson (R-Ill.), Republican conference chairman, opposed Rhodes, saying the increases would be moderate and were needed to halt the loss of some of the government's most valuable employees.

The bill does nothing to end the "compression" in the top classified pay grades of GS-16 to GS-18, where top professional civil servants now all get the same pay because of the \$36,000 ceiling on civil service employees. Re-establishing gaps between grades would require separate legislation. All will get the same comparability increase that is finally approved.

Pay for all officials covered by the bill has been frozen for six years because the machinery that was supposed to give them quadrennial pay raises without a vote by Congress got fouled up 2½ years ago.